

Stranger Things Holiday Extravaganza by Jedijonas17

Category: Stranger Things (TV 2016)

Genre: Fluff, It's all fluff, Mostly Mileven, SO MUCH FLUFF, lots of Mileven

Language: English

Characters: Dustin Henderson, Eleven (Stranger Things), Jim "Chief" Hopper, Lucas Sinclair, Maxine "Max" Mayfield, Mike Wheeler, Will Byers

Relationships: Eleven/Mike Wheeler, Maxine "Max" Mayfield/Lucas Sinclair

Status: In-Progress

Published: 2017-12-03

Updated: 2017-12-04

Packaged: 2022-04-03 05:09:06

Rating: Teen And Up Audiences

Warnings: Creator Chose Not To Use Archive Warnings

Chapters: 8

Words: 23,188

Publisher: archiveofourown.org

Summary:

Mike, Hopper, and the rest of the party help Eleven experience holidays for the first time. Starts with Christmas 1985 and continues with all of the major holidays in 1986. (Post season 2, the stories aren't exactly in a set timeline, so there may be some slight inconsistencies between the chapters)

1. Christmas: Part One

A little over a year had passed since Eleven had closed the gate and ended the Upside Down threat in Hawkins once and for all. They had gradually gone back to their normal lives as Will recovered from his possession. While she had to go back into hiding for about a year after, they had all visited her several times, with Mike visiting the most. Almost everyday after school, he would bike to the woods and walk to the cabin where he was greeted with an excited squeal and a hug from El. A lot of these visits had involved tutoring sessions for her, and in September Hopper had enrolled her in Hawkins High with the rest of them. Their party had grown now with the additions of Eleven and Max, who had thankfully reconciled. Both of them had proven to be quite the D&D players with some instructions, and were now valued members of the team.

It was now December, and a foot and a half of snow covered the ground in Hawkins. School had been canceled for the day, and all of the party members agreed to meet up in an hour for a day filled for snowball fights, snow angels, snowman building contests, and hot cocoa. Hopper still had to go into work, so he got Eleven all dressed into black snow pants, a purple winter coat, a purple hat, and purple mittens. He let her wear an old pair of his boots stuffed with socks, which surprisingly worked well. They hopped into his car and drove slowly over to the Wheeler's household. Eleven marveled at the glistening trees and mounds of fluffy white powder. While she had seen it when she had lived in the woods for a month, she hadn't had time to really admire its beauty. Now, she was going to experience it with all of her friends. Mike had been going on and on about all the activities they would have to do when it finally snowed for months.

They pulled up in the cul de sac and she saw five figures all bundled up in snow gear playing in the Wheelers front yard. One of them pointed at the approaching jeep and they all began to run towards it. Hopper stopped and she leaned over to give him a quick kiss on the cheek before jumping out of the car to meet her friends. "Be careful!" he called after her before driving off into the snow.

"Hi El!" she heard Mike call as they ran to meet each other. Much to his embarrassment, he tripped in the snow and fell face first into it about 5 feet from her. While everyone else laughed their heads off at his misfortune, Eleven carefully stopped in front of him and crouched down to look at him. He raised his head out of the cold snow and looked at her.

"Are you okay?" she asked with a concerned look on her face.

"Yeah, I just tripped cause these boots are too big."

She helped him up and he stood by her as the rest of the group continued laughing at them.

"Oh man Wheeler, you shoulda seen your face when you tripped!" Max said as she mimicked his fall, much to the joy of Lucas, Will, and Dustin.

"Eleven smirked and whispered something to Mike. He grinned and nodded. As the rest of them kept laughing and mocking Mike's fall, she closed her eyes and concentrated. All of the sudden, the four of them flew back about 5 feet, their shrieks of laughter turning to shrieks of fear. They landed unharmed thanks to the deep and soft snow. Now, it was Mike and Eleven's turn to laugh as the others got up and dusted themselves off.

"Hey that's not fair she used her powers!" Dustin yelled at them.

"Yeah anyway!" Lucas agreed with him as he helped Max up.

"Guys, I think the only way to settle this is with a... snowball fight!" Will exclaimed as he bent down to grab a snowball.

Teams were quickly decided, as Eleven grabbed Mike's hand and ran off with him to hide behind a tree, Lucas grabbed Max's hand and sprinted off in the opposite direction, and Will and Dustin were left in the middle. They quickly began to construct a makeshift fort to provide some sort of cover, halfway through the second wall, Dustin was knocked over once again as a wet and heavy snowball hit him squarely in the face. He left out a grunt as he fell over, and then heard a similar grunt as the same thing happened to Will. He sat up

and brushed the snow off his face. "Hey, that's bullshit! No powers!"

The only response he got was giggles coming from somewhere beyond them near a patch of bushes. Lucas and Max came up from behind them, their faces wet with melted snow as well. They all whispered a plan and made two snowballs each. They split up into two attack teams, with Lucas and Max going to the right, and Will and Dustin going to the left. They got into positions near the bushes and signaled each other with their hands. Lucas counted down. Three, two, one, and they sprinted around and caught Mike and Eleven completely off guard, pummeling them with snowballs. Each one connected and they went down, covering their eyes. The four stood over them, triumphantly high fiving as the two on the ground recovered.

"I gotta admit you guys, that was a good sneak attack." Mike said to them as they helped them up.

Lucas grinned at them. "Yeah, of course it was, I came up with it!"

Max hit his shoulder. "I helped dumbass!"

"Yeah yeah whatever Max." But they were all laughing.

Mike grabbed El's hand. "Guys, let's each make snowmen of ourselves to teach El how to make a snowman!" He began to pull her towards his backyard, where the snow was fresh and plentiful. The rest of the gang followed him.

"Mike, what is a 'Snow-man?'" Eleven asked him as the others got to work quickly.

"Oh, you just take 3 balls of snow and place one on top of the other, and then you can decorate it." he explained. "Want to help me first?"

She nodded and they got to work. He had her help him make the first and biggest snowball for the base, and when that was in place, he put her to work making the middle snowball while he made the smallest one for the head. He finished first and began looking for decorations.

He looked back and saw her struggling to move the second snowball on top of the first, but before he could go and help her, she stepped

back and raised her hand, levitating it on top of the other, and then packing snow around the base to make it level. He got an idea and ran inside to get something to fulfill said idea.

Outside, Eleven was hard at work. She had put the last snowball on top and was now adding small rocks to make eyes and a mouth. She didn't see Mike anywhere and decided that he must be looking for decorations still. She finished the face and stepped back from it just as she noticed Mike running back to her, holding something behind his back.

"Mike, what is that?" she asked, pointing to his arms.

"He smiled and told her to close her eyes. When he told her that she could open them, she was positively overjoyed at the sight. He had added arms to the snowman, one of them pointing out as if in an upraised position, while the other hung off to the side and held an Eggo waffle. It was *her*.

"Do you like it?" He asked her.

She walked up to him and wrapped her arms around him and kissed him. It was just a small peck on the lips, but he could still feel the love and care behind it. When they separated, he smiled at her. Before he could say anything though, a snowball hit him in the back. He whirled around, "Hey, I thought we were done with that?!"

It had been Max. "Yeah, but we are all freezing to death while you two make out! Come inside, we want hot chocolate!" she said, pointing to the other 3 boys as they entered Mike's basement.

He took El's hand and they walked to the door, following Max. "Come on, you're going to love hot cocoa."

One hour later

Filled with hot cocoa and warmed by the fireplace in his basement, they had all settled in to watch some television. While it was the middle of the day, there was still some okay shoes on. They settled on *Family Feud*, letting the voice of Richard Dawson fill the room as background noise while they chatted about school, home life, and other general stuff. One by one though, warm and cozy, they fell

asleep. First it was Will, who was the usual first on asleep, then Dustin, then Max, then Lucas, and soon it was only Mike and Eleven up. She used her powers to flip through the channels as they held hands.

On one channel though, she stopped and leaned forwards. It was a Christmas commercial. It showed Santa Claus handing out presents to little children and putting them underneath Christmas trees. It ended with all of the children and Santa yelling "Merry Christmas!"

Eleven flipped off the TV and looked at Mike very seriously. "What is Christmas?"

"It's this day where you get presents and stuff from your friends and parents and that guy, Santa. The presents get put underneath the tree that's decorated with lights and those colorful balls."

"How does Santa bring you the presents?"

Mike hadn't believed in Santa for over 3 years, but he didn't want to ruin the magic for her. "Well, no one has ever seen him, but most people think he is magical and uses his powers to get to every house in one night and then he comes down through the chimney and leaves presents."

"Like me?"

"What?" he asked, confused.

"Powers?"

"Oh, not exactly like you El. But same concept."

"Why is Christmas important?"

Oh boy, he did not want to try to explain God and Jesus and the Bible to her. It was simply too complicated. "There was this guy named Jesus who was born on Christmas a long time ago, but not everyone believed that. You'll have to ask Hopper about it."

"Okay. I hope Hopper celebrates Christmas and gets me presents. A tree would be nice too."

She was quiet after that, but Mike's head was alive with activity. He knew what he had to do. He had to go see the Chief.

2. Christmas: Part Two

About a week after Eleven had learned about Christmas, Mike biked down to the police station one day after school. El had wanted to come with him, but he told her to stay with the rest of the party, as he wouldn't be long. They were all heading to the arcade for a Pac-Man tournament, and the winner would get a dollar from each other party member. He had been working on his plan to give El the best Christmas celebration ever, and now he just had to get approval from Hopper to do it.

The snow had been cleared from the roads now, although much of it remained piled up along the sides. The trip down to the station was easy, but as he parked his bike outside, he began to get nervous. What if he said no, and all his plans were ruined? What if he messed up what he was trying to say? He counted to ten and calmed himself down a bit. He and Hopper, while not the best of buddies, had warmed up a bit to each other, mostly for Eleven's sake.

He stepped inside the warm building and asked if Hopper was in his office. Flo said that he was and told him to head back. He knocked on the door to be polite and opened it when he heard Hopper tell him to come in. He walked in and stood awkwardly in the middle of the room, not sure how to start.

Hopper gestured to one of the seats in front of his desk. "Well, take a seat kid. I assume you have a good reason to be here and not off running around with my daughter and your friends."

Mike cleared his throat. "Um, yes Sir I do. It's actually about her."

He leaned forward in his chair. "Is something wrong with her?"

"Oh, what. No uh, I want to throw her a little Christmas party. It would just be me coming over. I have a small tree I can bring and I figured I could get some lights from Joyce and maybe some ornaments too, or we could make some, me and her."

Hopper gave him a quizzical look. "What made you think about that?"

"Well Sir, we saw a Christmas commercial last week and she didn't know what it was. I explained it to her and she seemed to really like the idea. I was thinking that I could come over a few days before Christmas and help her set up the tree and give her my present, and then you could put presents under the tree from 'Santa'." He said, putting air quotes around the word Santa."

Hopper seemed to consider it for a few minutes. "Well, I don't see how it could hurt kid. Maybe you could even say you are sleeping over at one of your other friend's house and stay over. On the couch, of course." he added, slipping into dad mode.

"Really? You'd be okay with it?"

"Yeah. I was going to get her presents, but she'll love the tree and your Santa idea."

He jumped out of his chair and went to hug him across the desk, but stopped short. His face grew hot and he mumbled thanks before sitting back down.

Hopper chuckled at the kid. They decided that he would come over on the 20th of the month. He would use sleeping over at Will's as his cover story, as he knew he would not make fun of him for his plans. He now just had to get everything together for the actual day, and he would be all set. The hardest part would be waiting for the day to come, as he was very excited about the prospect of him and Eleven spending a whole day and night alone with each other.

The 20th

Today was finally the day. Mike had spent the last week and a half preparing the supplies he would need for today. He had gone over to the Byers and explained his situation to Will and Joyce. Will, always the sensitive one in the party, said he could totally cover for him if his mom called. Joyce had gone out to their shed and gotten him 3 strings of lights that she still had leftover from when Will had disappeared 2 years prior. She managed to scrounge up a box of extra ornaments they didn't use anymore either. He had given her a quick hug as thanks and left. Joyce smiled at him as he rode away on his bike. He and Eleven made the cutest couple.

The next day he had gone down to the Radio Shack in town after school. Eleven was saddened to see him ride off without her again which broke his heart, but he knew it would be worth it in the end. He had browsed the aisles until he had found what he had been looking for. A supercomm that was just like the ones he and his friends used to contact each other. This was their new long range model, so she should be able to contact him, even all the way out in her cabin.

It wasn't cheap, but with all of his money plus a few dollars from Nancy he had begged and pleaded for, he had just enough. He had planned to use his money to buy new figurines and a board for D&D, but he thought this was much more important. He was sure the others would be disappointed he hadn't, but to him, Eleven was worth a thousand D&D figures. He purchased the walkie talkie and biked over to his house to put it in his room before biking over to Will's house to meet up with the rest of his party.

Now, Friday the 20th, he was ready to put his plan in action. The day before, he had asked Hopper to keep El from coming home for about an hour after school so he could set things up. He had agreed, and planned to take her to the library and maybe to the pet shop to look at the puppies before coming home. After school, Eleven was once again disheartened that he could not go with her, and it was everything he could do from telling her about his surprise. They hugged goodbye and shared a quick kiss, and he promised he would see her soon. She waved to them as Hopper drove away.

"So Mike, want to come to the arcade with us?" Dustin asked.

"Nope, sorry guys, I have somewhere to be." he said before mounting his bike and riding off down the street.

"Ten bucks it has something to do with Eleven." Lucas said, and the rest of them nodded in agreement.

By the time Mike reached the small cabin in the woods, he only had about 40 minutes to get ready before Eleven would arrive. He quickly got to work, uncovering the tree and decorations he had given to Hopper earlier in the week. They had been stashed behind the cabin underneath a tarp. He carried each box in and carefully set them

down near where the tree would go. He got out the tree stand and spent 5 minutes trying to figure out how to set it up, as his mother usually did this part at his house. Finally, he got the two sections to look together, and he placed this in the corner. He glanced at his watch and panicked when he realized that he only had 20 minutes left.

He ran back outside and began the arduous task of dragging the tree around the house and up the steps into it. Whether he liked to admit it, his arms were much better for moving a joystick or flipping a page than they were for any physical activity. After about another 5 minutes, he had gotten it locked into the stand. He looked at it from all angles, making sure it was straight. He clipped off one stray branch and threw it outside before returning to the cabin. He up things as he waited for their return. Thankfully, he didn't have to wait long as they were a few minutes earlier. He hid behind the couch as he heard their voices get close.

The door opened and he heard a gasp of delight as she saw the undecorated tree. He then heard the sound of several books hitting the floor as she turned and hugged Hopper. "Oh thank you thank you thank you!"

He laughed and removed her arms from around him. "It's not me you gotta thank kid."

Mike thought that was a good signal as any, so he stood up from behind the couch and barely had a second to register her tears of joy before she jumped over the couch and slammed into him. It took a few seconds for him to react to Eleven's sudden hug, but then he wrapped her up in his arms. She was crying but he knew it was because she was happy. "Mike, you got me a tree! Just like on TV!" She looked up at him and kissed him, once, twice, and was going in for a third when Hopper cleared his throat.

"Now I know you're happy, but that tree isn't going to decorate itself." He said. It was a nice way of telling them to separate a little, and while Mike realized that and felt his face redden, Eleven just simply got more excited.

She turned to Mike. "You got decorations too?"

He nodded and pointed to the two boxes on the floor next to the tree. She ran over and pulled the lids off. She held up two of the ornaments and let out a gasp of awe at their shine. She carefully put them down and opened the other box, which contained the three strings of lights.

"So El, do you like the surprise?"

"I love it! Can we decorate now?" she asked with a pleading look on her face.

"Of course we can. First we have to wrap the lights around the tree, and then we can put the ornaments and tinsel on."

She picked up one of the strands of lights and threw it on the tree and turned around smiling at him. He laughed and shook his head. "Did I do it right?" she asked.

"Not exactly. Here, I'll do the first one, and then you can try the second." He picked up the strands off of the tree and began at the bottom, wrapping them around throughout the branches. He reached the midway point and his strand ended, so he moved away to let her finish it up. She took another strand and was doing a pretty good job until she got about three-fourths of the way and couldn't reach the lights anymore. Mike came up from behind her and finished up the lights, as he had grown much more than she had the past year and was now 5'7". He plugged in the lights and they stepped back to admire their work. She took his hand in hers.

"Now we get to put on the ornaments, which is my favorite part." he told her, picking out a red ball and hanging it around the middle of the tree. She picked out a blue one and put it on the branch right next to his. They continued like this for awhile hanging ornaments and tinsel around the tree. Hopper turned on a christmas station on the radio, and Mike helped her learn the words to the songs. She had a surprisingly good singing voice, as did Hopper. They both were struck silent when he began belting out the cords to "Last Christmas" by Wham! After a few seconds though, Mike joined it, and soon the three of them were singing loudly and dancing around the cabin. Eleven switched from Mike to Hopper and back again, as she couldn't decide on who to dance with. The song ended and they all laughed for a minute at themselves. Eleven decided she was hungry and

Hopper decided that he would go and get pizza for them.

He put his coat on and was getting ready to leave when he said, "Hey, I got chocolate chips earlier. Maybe you could teach her how to make cookies?"

Mike nodded and Hopper left. "What are cookies Mike?"

"Oh, they are these round things that are sweet and sometimes have different candies in them. They are really good."

"And we make them?"

"Yeah, come over here and I'll show you." He was no baker, but he could follow directions easily enough, and thankfully there was some on the package of chocolate chips. He and Eleven worked to find all the necessary ingredients, such as flour, butter, eggs, and other things. He let her do most of the work, with only a few helpful hints along the way. It was good practice for her to read the directions herself.

It was all going smoothly until she put the mixer in and started it much too earlier. The dry flour was flung everywhere, and it covered the both of them as well as the counter and floor. She quickly stopped the mixer and turned to stare at Mike, her mouth open wide. For about five seconds they were silent, and then they both began to laugh hysterically at themselves. They got a towel and cleaned up as much flour as they could. They towed off their hair and faces before putting the dough on a baking sheet and putting it in the oven. He set a timer and they sat down on the couch.

"Do you want your present now El?"

She nodded excitedly, so he walked over and grabbed his bag. He had tried to wrap it but that had gone rather poorly. Not that she cared of course. He handed it to her and she quickly unwrapped it.

"Oh, Mike. It's one of those talkie things right?" she asked

"Yeah. I figured you could use it to talk to us. It might be easier because you don't have to tire yourself out using your powers."

"I love it. Now I can talk to you guys all the time!"

He looked over at her smiling and noticed she still had a streak of flour on her cheek. He reached over and got it off with his finger, but she caught his hand and held it there.

"I'm really glad you did this for me." she said, turning so that she was facing him.

"I wanted you to experience what Christmas was like."

"It was very thoughtful of you. I really like you Mike."

She began to lean over his legs, inching closer to his face. He rose up to meet her halfway and their lips connected. This kiss felt different from the others they had shared. It was fiery and passionate. Mike lied back down and El fell on top of him. She felt an intense warmth deep in her stomach as they continued to kiss. His hands roamed her back and sides, while hers were wrapped behind his back, holding him close. She went up for air, but a second later she was back for more. The kisses deepened and got more intense as time went on.

Knock Knock. Knock. Knock Knock Knock.

They flew apart and Mike ran into the bathroom. Eleven turned on the TV and unlocked the door. Hopper walked in holding two pizzas and he kicked his boots on the door frame, as he didn't want to track too much snow into his home. He set the pizzas down on the table. "Hey kid, where's Mike?"

She pointed. "Bathroom."

He nodded. "Got it. Did you guys make the cookies?"

Almost as if waiting for the right moment, the timer went off. Hopper pulled the tray out of the oven and turned on the timer. "Mmm, these smell great. They'll be a nice dessert."

Mike walked out of the bathroom, his face much less flushed. "Hi Sir."

"Hi Mike. Come on guys, I'm hungry," Hop replied, sitting down at the table. While they ate, they talked about their plans for break, how school was going, if they had any projects coming up, that sort of thing. He asked Mike how his sister and parents were doing, and

Hopper told them some funny stories about his dealings with citizens while he was patrolling, such as the time he had to climb in a tree to get Mrs. Baker's cat down. Mike and Eleven told stories of funny things that had happened at school and with their friends during the past week. Both of them loved science, and while Hopper didn't get it much, he listened patiently to their stories of Mr. Clarke and what he was teaching them.

After pizza, they all sat on the couch and watched Christmas movies together while eating their cookies and drinking hot chocolate. Hopper sat on one end of the couch while Mike and Eleven cuddled on the other end. Around 11:30, they were all beginning to get very tired, so Hop shut off the TV and ordered them to bed.

"And remember, he stays on the couch." He told them before bidding them goodnight and shutting his door. About fifteen minutes later though, El padded out of her room in her pink and purple footie pajamas and lied down next to Mike on the couch.

"Uh, Eleven? He told us we couldn't sleep together."

"No, he said you had to stay on the couch."

While Mike knew that Hopper hadn't meant it that literally, the weight and warmth from her pressing on his side was comforting, so he wrapped his arms around her and pulled her close. They were silent, and he thought she had fallen asleep.

After a few minutes though, she spoke up. "Mike, thanks again."

"Yeah El, it was my pleasure."

"Merry Christmas Mike. You are the best present I could ever ask for."

"Merry Christmas Eleven. I couldn't ask for anything better."

"I love you."

"I love you too."

The next morning

Hopper awoke earlier as usual and got out of bed, stretching and yawning. He made his way out into the kitchen where he came upon

an interesting sight. Mike and Eleven were curled up together on his couch fast asleep. She seemed to shudder in her sleep, and there was the boy's hand caressing her arm, and she settled. He knew he should be mad, but they technically hadn't broken his rule. He knew it had been Eleven who had taken his words too literally, as she still had trouble understanding the implied meanings of words and phrases. Plus, and he would never say this out loud, they looked really cute together. He grabbed an old Polaroid camera and snapped 3 pictures of the two. One for him, one for her, and one for the boy. He set the camera down and smiled at them before heading to make a breakfast of Eggos and Eggs for the three of them.

3. New Year's Eve

A little over a week had passed since Mike had thrown Eleven his little Christmas surprise. The actual day had come and gone, and she had told him about everything she had gotten from Hopper that night on her new walkie talkie. She had gotten several new books, as reading was one of her favorite things besides Eggos and Mike, some new clothes, and a makeup set. She had also gotten Ghostbusters and all three Star Wars movies from the boys and Max, which she had begun watching that night with Hopper.

Now, the party was on Christmas vacation, and they were spending almost every day together. They went to the arcade, went sledding and snowboarding, had several more snowball fights, and had several sleepovers. Anytime else, they were usually in Mike's basement, the four boys crowded around the D&D table while Max and Eleven watched or did other things. Occasionally they would join in with their Mage and Zoomer characters, but most of the time Eleven read in her pillow fort or next to Mike as they held hands under the table, and Max would read comic books next to Lucas.

Today was no different, and they were halfway through an 8 hour campaign Mike had planned out a few days prior. All six of them were playing this time around, much to the delight of the four boys. They had just entered the Forest of Darkness, and were slowly making their way through it, fighting trolls and goblins as they appeared.

"Your group reaches a blood-red river. The water is rushing too fast to cross through. You see an old wooden bridge a little off to your left. It doesn't look very sturdy, but it is the only way across in sight. Do you risk the bridge or look for another way across?" Mike said, continuing the story.

"I think we should cross, we're already behind schedule!" Lucas argued.

"Being late won't matter if we're dead Lucas!" Dustin responded, rolling his eyes.

"I'm with Dustin this time," Max said, rubbing his hand in a "I'm sorry" kind of way.

He pulled his hand back in feigned disgust. "My own girlfriend! Unbelievable!"

Everyone else laughed at the two while Mike turned to the two members who hadn't spoken yet. "El, Will, it's up to you two to decide which path is taken."

Eleven spoke up after a few seconds of careful consideration. "I think we cross the

bridge. Lucas is right, we have to get to the dungeon soon, or the princess will die." she said softly.

Lucas let out a cheer while Max and Dustin groaned. "All right Will, it's up to you." Mike

told him.

He was silent for about 30 seconds. Lucas finally spoke up. "Crossing is obviously the best idea dude."

"No, we have to be safe!" Max and Dustin yelled back at his comment, and soon the basement was filled with the arguments of the three members trying to convince Will on which course he should agree upon.

Mike glanced at Eleven and rolled his eyes. She giggled at this and nodded. He stood up and slammed his hands down on the table, rattling the pieces on the board and silencing the three bickering kids. "You have spent too much time debating, and are now surrounded by 10 hungry and vicious hill giants!"

The group groaned. "Now we're in some deep shit guys, good job!" Dustin said in an exasperated tone.

They quickly decided that Will and Max would distract the giants while Eleven used her magic powers to levitate Dustin and Lucas over the river. This plan was working well, as everyone kept getting high rolls and were able to perform their actions with ease. Unfortunately, halfway through this task, Karen Wheeler opened the door to tell

Mike that his friends had to go home. Hopper was waiting outside for Eleven, and Will's mom had called to tell her that Jonathan was on his way for Will. They all sighed and agreed to finish it up as soon as possible. As everyone gathered their things, talk turned to their plans for tomorrow.

"You all are coming to the party at my house for New Year's Eve right?" Will asked.

A resounding choruses of yes sounded from every member of the group besides Eleven. She just looked at them all with a confused look on her face. As Will and everyone else walked upstairs, she watched Mike clean up the trash from the floor.

He looked at her. "Shouldn't you go before Hopper comes down here and drags you out?" he said with a laugh.

"Mike, what is New Year's Eve?" she asked him.

"It's another holiday, sort of like Christmas." he explained.

"Presents?" she asked with a hopeful tone and look in her eyes.

"No, no presents," he saw her face fall. "But you get to stay up with your friends till midnight and eat lots of good food."

"Why is that so important?"

"Well, when the clock reaches twelve, it's the new year. It's to celebrate the the new year beginning and a time to remember all the fun you had the previous year."

"The new year will be 1986."

"Yeah, exactly. Every year the Byers hold a party for all of us and we celebrate it there. On TV we watch a big ball drop at midnight, and we all count down the new year together."

She didn't really understand the point of the ball dropping, but decided to leave it alone for now. "Can I come?"

"Well of course you can, I figured Will had invited you already."

"I hope Hop says I can come."

He walked over to her and kissed her forehead. "I'm sure he will. Now go. I hope I see you tomorrow." She kissed his cheek and he waved as she ran up the basement steps and out the door. She ran out the front door, saying a quick goodbye to Mrs. Wheeler in the kitchen. She hopped into the passenger side of the Jeep and put her seat belt on as Hopper put the car into drive and sped off towards home.

"So kid, did you have fun?" he asked her.

Not even bothering to answer his question first, she looked at him and asked, "Can we

go to the Byers for New Year's Eve?"

He looked towards her in the darkened car. "Were you invited?"

"Yes. Mike told me it is really fun."

He considered it for a few moments, and said "Well, if you were invited I don't see why

we can't." She let out a sound of happiness and hugged him. She settled down and turned on the radio, tuning it to a pop station. Under his breath, Hopper mumbled, "And besides, it has been awhile since I've seen Joyce."

"What was that dad?"

"Oh nothing important."

New Year's Eve

Joyce had spent the past several hours running around to different stores, gathering supplies for the several guests coming over. All six party members were coming, along with Jonathan and Nancy, and to her surprise Jonathan had asked if Steve could come. Apparently, he and Jonathan and Nancy were all good friends now, and he was also super close to the kids as well.

She got multiple types of chips and dip and pretzels for everyone to eat, along with some ingredients to make some more substantial foods. She grabbed two bottles of champagne along with lots of soda

for the kids. She stopped at her place of work and bought noisemakers, paper hats, streamers, and poppers for some festive decorations. She and Will spent the rest of the afternoon setting it all up and getting ready.

Around Six PM, the first guests began to arrive. The doorbell rang and Joyce answered it, welcoming Nancy and Jonathan into the house. Will got up and hugged Jonathan, as he hadn't seen him for ages. Him and Nancy gave each other a quick hug too, and they all went and sat down as they told stories about their time at NYU.

Soon, more people began to show up. A few minutes later, Lucas and Max showed up and joined the other three in the living room. She heard their laughter as Nancy finished telling a story about her and Jonathan. She smiled at them all bonding as she continued to prepare food for the guests. In the living room, they were already munching on cheese and crackers.

Everyone else arrived in quick succession. Mike was the next to show up, and he hugged his sister much like Will had hugged Jonathan, as he hadn't seen her for a long time. Next, Dustin showed up with Steve. It was clear to Joyce that no hard feelings were felt as Nancy gave Steve a quick hug and then Jonathan and Steve embraced like old buddies. Everyone was here but Eleven and Hopper.

They were all in the living room playing charades. Lucas was up taking his turn, trying to imitate a Jawa, but no one was getting it. Everyone was yelling their guesses out, very much into the game, except for one person. Mike sat amidst everyone, but instead of his usual self, he was quiet and sad. An hour had passed and Eleven still hadn't shown up. His friends noticed his attitude but chose to ignore it for now.

At eight, just when he was ready to give up, the doorbell rang. He jumped up before the sound had even registered to everyone there and flung open the door. Eleven and Hopper were standing on the porch. He was holding a bottle of eggnog and a small plate of chocolate chip cookies. She saw him and immediately jumped into his arms and they hugged each other tightly. The adults just smiled at the couple warmly, but the rest of the kids all gagged and made faces at them. Not that they noticed of course.

"I missed you Mike." she said

Before he could respond, Hopper interrupted, "Kid, you just saw him yesterday."

She turned to face her dad. "Long time," she stated. Sometimes she still reverted back to her old way of speaking that she had had when they had first found her.

He laughed and looked at Joyce. "Sorry we're late. She wanted to make these cookies and I wanted to stop and get you this," he said referencing the eggnog in his hand.

She stepped forward and took them. "Oh, there's still plenty of time to celebrate. Take off your jacket and come help me in the kitchen please?" she smelled the cookies. "Eleven, dear, these smell wonderful, thank you so much."

El was positively beaming at her. "You're welcome Mrs. Byers."

They went back and joined the group in playing charades. When it was Mike's turn, he chose to imitate Eleven by sticking out his hand and doing the most intense stare he could muster. Everyone laughed at him, as it was obvious who he was. After charades, they turned on the TV to watch the New Year's Eve news show. The kids entertained themselves with the hats and noisemakers in the living room while the adults entertained themselves with the eggnog Hopper had brought in the kitchen.

"Hey El, try one of these bad boys," Dustin said, holding out a pig in a blanket.

She hesitated. "What makes them bad?"

He laughed, which only confused her more. She looked to Mike for an explanation. "It's just an expression El, they aren't actually bad. They taste pretty good." he said.

Still unsure, but wanting to trust Mike, she took it and popped it into her mouth. Her face turned into one of satisfaction as she chewed and swallowed it, much to the amusement of the others. "More," was her only response to it.

They talked and messed around with each other, eating food and playing games while they waited for midnight to roll around. Eleven wasn't used to staying up this late. Hopper still made her go to bed by ten on school nights, and even at sleepovers she was usually asleep by eleven thirty. She and Mike had retreated to Will's room for some quiet time away from the others. They sat on his bed and looked at some of his picture books he still had laying around. She yawned and stretched before laying her head into his lap as he continued to read to her. Her eyes began to shut and he shook her gently awake.

"El, you can't fall asleep just yet. Only 15 more minutes."

"But Mikeeeeeee, I'm tired."

"I know, but you can't fall asleep before midnight on New Year's Eve."

"Why?" she asked.

"Because, it's bad luck, and..." he suddenly grew quiet and his face flushed, not wanting to tell her that he wanted to kiss her at midnight. "Anyway, come on, we have to rejoin the others for the countdown."

She groaned but took the hand he offered and walked out of Will's room. Back in the living room, Joyce offered them each a popper and a glass of sparkling cider. He told her to pull on the string when the ball dropped. The minutes quickly passed, and soon there was only seconds to go.

They all began to count down. "Ten, nine, eight, seven, six, five, four, three, two, one HAPPY NEW YEAR!" they cheered as they pulled on their poppers, filling the room with confetti. Over in one corner, Nancy stood on tiptoes and gave Jonathan a passionate kiss before turning and giving Steve a peck on the cheek. Max and Lucas gave each other a quick kiss on the lips as well, much to the amusement of Dustin and Will. Over in the other corner, Joyce grabbed Hopper's neck and brought him down to her level to give him a deep kiss on the lips. They separated and looked at each other for a second before laughing and hugging each other.

Eleven looked at Mike with her standard confused look on her face. "Mike, why are they all kissing?"

His face flushed again. "Oh, um, I don't know why, but it's something

people do when the new year begins."

"Oh," was all she said before wrapping her arms around him and giving him the most passionate kiss of the night. That same warm feeling came back to Eleven as he deepened the kiss. They finally separated, and Mike could've sworn there were fireworks going off in his heart. They smiled at each other, and he knew that this had been the best New Year's Eve of his life.

Finally, everyone settled down. Steve, Nancy and Jonathan bid everyone a good night and left, and all the boys and Max began to get out sleeping bags and spread them on the floor. Eleven gave a hopeful look at her dad and he nodded towards them. Her face lit up and she grabbed some blankets and made herself a little bed.

In less than fifteen minutes, everyone was out like a light, exhausted from the festivities. Hopper gestured with his pack of cigarettes toward the door, and he and Joyce stepped over the sleeping kids and went outside. Mike and Eleven had somehow moved over Will and were now soundly asleep in each other's arms. They just smiled and shut the door. He lit their cigarettes and they were silent for a few minutes, just enjoying the other's company.

"They are a good group of kids. They really care about each other," Joyce said suddenly.

"Yeah, they are," he said in agreement. She stepped closer to him and he put his arms

around her, pulling her close.

"And if El and Mike aren't married in 15 years, you can throw me in the Upside Down." she said.

He laughed at that, and held her close.

4. Valentine's Day

The new year was going very smoothly for everyone in the party. The kids had gone back to school, but still managed to hang out more days of the week than not. To no one's surprise, Joyce and Hopper had continued to see each other after their kiss on New Year's Eve. Will and Eleven had been particularly excited when they realized that they could maybe be brother and sister one day, if Hopper and Joyce continued to be together. It was now February, and since it wasn't so bitterly cold anymore, the kids were beginning to ride their bikes to school and elsewhere in the town regularly. Eleven didn't have a bike of her own yet, so she still rode on the back of Mike's, not that either of them had any complaints about this situation. That all changed when Hopper dropped her off at the Wheeler's house on Saturday the 8th.

"Mike! Look what Hopper bought me!" she said, proudly showing off the silver and pink mountain bike he had purchased for her the day before.

"Wow El, that looks so cool," he said, and even though he was sad this meant she wouldn't ride on the back of his bike anymore, he meant it. Most of their bikes were old and rusty, but this bike was brand new and shiny. "Do you know how to ride it?"

"I think so," she said before hopping on. She managed to go a few feet before tumbling to the pavement. He ran to her side and helped her up. "Okay, maybe not," she admitted.

"I was thinking that you and your friends could maybe help her learn to ride it," Hopper said to him. "I would, but Callahan is off on vacation right now, so I have to work double shifts," he explained.

"Yeah, we can definitely help her," he replied, picking the bike up off the ground.

"Thanks kid, it means a lot to the both of us," was all Hopper said before getting back into the Jeep and rushing off towards the station.

No one else had arrived yet, so it was just Mike helping her for now.

"Okay El, we're gonna try this again, but this time I'm going to steady you while you ride, okay?" he said, holding the bike for her to get on.

"Okay," she said, getting onto the bike seat as he held it for her.

"Now put one foot on the pedal and one on the ground," He waited for her to do as he said. "Good, now on the count of three, push the pedal down and then lift your other foot onto the other pedal, and then keep pushing them one after the other. Understand?" he asked.

She nodded, and when he reached three she did just as he said, and she began to move. "Mike, look, I'm doing it!"

He laughed at her excitement. "Good job El! Now, try and turn to the left so you don't hit the curb."

She did, and soon they were going around the cul de sac for their second time. If anyone looked out their windows at that moment, they would have seen the strange sight of a 15 year old boy helping a 14 year old girl learn to ride a bike. Not that they would have cared of course. As they were starting their third time around, Mike told her he was going to let go. She managed to make it around halfway before she turned too hard to the left and fell right off to the side. Unfortunately for Mike, he was what she fell onto, as he had been standing close by just in case.

She landed right on top of him and looked at him with concern in her big brown eyes, "Are you okay?" she asked him.

"Yeah, I'm fine," he said with a groan.

"I'm sorry," she said before leaning down to kiss his lips. "Better?" she asked when they separated.

"Yeah, much better," he said, smiling up at her.

Their sweet moment didn't last long however, as it was interrupted by the arrival of the other four party members. "Hey, why don't you two get a room so we don't have to watch!" Dustin yelled at them.

They quickly got up, their faces red with embarrassment. "I'm just teaching her how to ride her bike," Mike explained softly.

"Are you sure about that Wheeler? Because it looked like you were trying to teach her how to suck your face better," Max said, making their faces flush even more and sending the other three boys into fits of laughter.

Once everyone had calmed down, Eleven got back on her bike to try again. Mike helped her go around once before letting her go. She went around several times with no problems at all, and her friends cheered for her as she came to a stop in front of them. "Mike, I did it all by myself!" she said, a hint of pride in her voice.

"Nice job El!" he said, and they all gave her high fives. To celebrate, they all got on their bikes (or skateboard in Max's case) and rode down to Tony's Pizza. Eleven made it there with no crashes or problems of any kind. They went inside the warm building and five of them went to get a booth while Dustin ordered for them. In a few minutes, they were all chowing down on warm and gooey cheese pizza.

"I could eat this for the rest of my life," Dustin said, and the others nodded their agreement.

"Tony's Pizza is definitely the best in town, no doubt about it," Will agreed. They sat there and ate their pizza while they talked about movies, their latest D&D campaign, and the agony of school. El excused herself to go to the bathroom, and Max went with her. Dustin used this opportunity to ask Mike and Lucas a question.

"So guys, what are you two doing next week for Valentine's Day?" he asked.

Lucas was ready with his response. "Well, first I'm taking her to the arcade since it's her favorite place in town, and then to the quarry because there is an awesome lookout point you can reach with a short hike."

Dustin looked at Mike. "And what about you?"

"Oh, well, I haven't really thought about it to be honest-" before he could even continue, he was interrupted by Dustin and Lucas freaking out.

"Mike, you have to do something! Even I know that and I don't have a girlfriend!" Dustin said.

"She's not my girlfriend," he mumbled under his breath.

"Mike, dude, you have to do something for her," Lucas said.

"Okay! I'll think of something," he told them. Will cleared his throat and everyone shut up as the girls sat back down.

"What were you guys talking about?" Max asked, noticing their silence.

"Nothing," they said in unison.

Max seemed suspicious but let it go for now. Mike held El's hand underneath the table, thinking about what he could possibly do for such a special girl.

Valentine's Day

Valentine's Day fell on a Friday this year, much to the relief of Mike. His plans would work much better since they had more time. He had spent the last week planning and preparing his several surprises and gifts for today. On Monday he had gone down to Harvey's Tool Shop and bought some metal that he would be able to melt down. He had made a little Eggo mold out of clay and wanted to make a small charm to put on a chain that he got from one of Nancy's old necklaces she had left at home. He had gone into his backyard and used a small fire to melt the metal, which he then poured into the mold and left to harden. He had burned his finger, but the finished product looked so good he didn't care.

Thursday afternoon he had left Eleven with the boys and Max and had gone down to the flower shop, where he had bought 6 roses and got a small box of chocolates for her. On Friday morning he put these items, along with a box of Eggos and some drinks into a picnic basket. He was going to take her to the lake that Hopper's trailer was situated on for a small picnic and maybe some stargazing afterwards.

The school day seemed to take forever. Eleven was dropped off at his house with her bike, and when he had gone outside to meet her, she

had thrown her arms around him and kissed him deeply. She gave him a card that read "Happy Valentine's Day Mike" and had a picture of a heart on the front. On the inside, there was a stick figure drawing of the two of them holding hands on one side, and on the other there was a bunch of little hearts everywhere. He loved it and had promptly put it on his dresser, much to his delight. He gave her his card he had made for her, which wasn't much different from his. She put it in her jacket pocket closest to her heart, and then they had biked off to school.

Every moment they had together that day they were holding each other's hands, determined not to let go. Even when Troy made fun of him for it, it didn't diminish Mike's mood in the slightest. Mike had been waiting for Eleven in the hallway when Troy came up to him and pushed him into a locker, but all of the sudden he had flown back 10 feet. Mike looked around and saw Eleven walking toward him, wiping her nose. He smiled at Troy before walking away hand in hand with her.

Finally, the last bell rung, and they all gathered by their bikes. Lucas and Max said goodbye before heading off to the arcade, and Dustin and Will also bid Mike and Eleven farewell before heading off to have some "guy time" they said.

"So Mike, you said you had plans?" she asked him as they began to bike away from the school.

"Yeah El, first we need to go back to my house. I have some stuff there."

"Okay," she said, and they were off. When they reached his house he grabbed the basket and some money.

"Alright El, the first stop on our Valentine's Day journey is... The ice cream shop!" he said, flourishing his hands.

She giggled at his antics, but clapped her hands. Besides Eggos of course, ice cream had been one of her favorite foods she had ever tried. "That sounds like a lot of fun Mike, and I love ice cream!"

"I know you do, that's why I picked it as our first stop," he said,

pulling her into a hug. They began to bike towards the shop. It was in the middle of town, but Eleven was a fast learner and had no problems biking there. They stepped inside the shop and took their favorite booth in the corner. Mike ordered for them. El's favorite was plain vanilla with whipped cream and chocolate sprinkles, and his want mint chocolate with hot fudge. He carried them back to the booth and they sat in silence for a while, enjoying each other's company and the ice cream.

He watched her eat her sundae and smiled at her. He felt so complete when they were together, like no wrong could happen to either of them. It could be below freezing, but her presence always warmed him up right away. He knew people would say he was too young to be in love, but he knew that he was, no matter what they said. He wanted to be with Eleven for the rest of his life. No one could make him feel the way she did.

She noticed him watching her and smiled shyly, "What?"

He brushed a lock of hair out of her face, "I'm just thinking how lucky I am to be with you."

She smiled and leaned over and their lips connected. She noticed how they tasted like the hot fudge from his sundae. They separated and smiled at each other. They finished their ice cream, reminiscing about moments from their past, such as the day they had first met, and their first day of school together, and other times such as when he had shown up to the cabin unannounced one day when Hopper hadn't been there because she had told him that she had felt sick. He had brought medicine and games and movies, and they had spent the entire day together.

She knew that she loved him, just like the people on her soap operas did. She hadn't known the word for this feeling at first, but with her dictionary and some advice from Max, she knew it was love that she felt when she was with Mike.

They finished their ice cream and waved to the owner as they left. They hopped back onto their bikes and she followed Mike throughout the town to their next stop. After a few minutes they reached the lake where Hopper's old trailer was. He led her to the shore where he pulled out a blanket and spread it out for the two of them to sit on.

He pulled out the box of Eggos and she immediately tore open it open and pulled one out for herself. Mike watched her happily munching on it for a few seconds before pulling one out for himself and taking a bite. They sat there enjoying the sounds of the birds in the trees and the lapping of the small waves in the lake.

"This is really nice Mike, thank you for today," she said suddenly, shocking Mike out of his thoughts.

He blushed. "Yeah, no problem." No problem? Could he have made that sound lamer? "Uh, I have some presents for you. Just some small things." Her eyes lit up and she leaned forward, looking at the basket. He reached inside and pulled out the roses. "Here, these are for you."

She took them and smelled them, but gave Mike a puzzled look, "Why flowers?"

"Well, uh, ya know, I don't actually know why. People just give people they like flowers on Valentine's Day."

"Do you like me Mike?" she asked, smiling at him.

"Yeah. I like you a lot El," he pulled out the chocolates and handed them to her. "I got you these too."

She made a noise of happiness and opened them, pulling out two of them. She popped one into her mouth and gave the other one to Mike, who took it and thanked her.

"El, I have one more present for you," he said, pulling out a small box from his back pocket. "I made this for you earlier this week."

She took it and opened it. Inside was a small chain with a silver charm on the end. She brought it closer to her eyes, and saw that the charm was actually a little Eggo. Her eyes began to get watery and she practically threw herself at Mike, wrapping her arms around him. He was a little taken aback at first at her sudden hug, but quickly recovered and hugged her back. "Thank you Mike, this is the best present of all time."

"Well I figured I had to get a good present for the best person I know."

She let go of him and they huddled together underneath a 2nd blanket he had brought with them, as it was getting colder as night fell. They were entangled in each other's arms as the stars began to appear. Mike pointed out different constellations as she nestled her head against his chest. They stayed that way for about half an hour before Mike realized how late it was getting. He got up, much to Eleven's distress, and began cleaning up their trash. He stopped when her arms wrapped around him once more from behind. "Thank you for a wonderful day Mike."

"Yeah, it was my pleasure El," he said. He swallowed. "Eleven. I really, really like you, and being with you makes me feel happier than anything else. I don't know if you feel the exact same way, but, um, I was wondering if you wanted to be my girlfriend?" he asked with a hopeful tone to his voice.

"What's a girlfriend?" he heard her ask from behind him. He turned around to face her. While it hadn't been the answer he was expecting, it also definitely wasn't the worst possible answer.

"Well, you know how we hold hands and hug a lot, and sometimes we kiss too? When you're boyfriend and girlfriend, you do those things with only each other. So we'd only do those things with each other."

"Oh," was all she said before leaning in close and kissing him. She deepened the kiss, and deciding to try something she had seen on TV, she prodded at him lips with her tongue. He seemed surprised by it, but he opened his mouth anyway and accepted it. She pushed him over and landed on top of him. She pressed his hands back onto the blanket as she laid on top of him. He broke the kiss and began peppering her face and neck with dozens of little kisses. She felt that fire deep inside of her start up again, and she let out a moan, which surprised both of them. They began laughing as they sat up. He gave her one more kiss.

"So is that a yes?" he asked.

She laughed. "Of course."

"I love you Eleven."

"I love you too Mike," and for the first time, they truly meant it in every sense of the word.

5. Interlude One

Eleven sat at the Byers dining room table with Will one warm afternoon in early March. They were both drawing pictures of their D&D characters. Hopper had been hanging out with Joyce when he had gotten called into the station, so he had asked Joyce if she could watch El while he dealt with this problem. Joyce had happily agreed, as she loved spending time with her, as she didn't have any daughters of her own.

Will and her compared their drawings. His was extremely detailed as usual, while Eleven still mostly drew stick figures. Nonetheless, he reassured her that what she had drawn was very good, and she sent a shy smile his way as thanks. He got up to use the bathroom, leaving Joyce and El alone in the room.

"Mike asked me to be his girlfriend," she said suddenly, breaking the silence.

Joyce turned away from what she was cooking on the stove. "That's great El. It sure took him long enough. He's been head over heels for you since you met."

"On Valentine's Day he did. He also told me that he loved me," she said, smiling as she remembered the fond memory.

"And do you love him back?" she asked.

"Yes. I'm positive I do."

Joyce smiled, "You know, normally if kids your age told each other that they loved them, I would think it was crazy. But with you two, it just seems right."

"Can I ask you a question Joyce?" Eleven asked after a few seconds of silence.

"Sure sweetie, anything."

"When me and Mike kiss, I've been getting a weird feeling in my stomach."

"What do you mean? Like butterflies?"

"Butterflies?" she asked, with her signature look she got when she didn't understand something.

"Yeah, like your stomach feels all nervous and it gets excited and it feels like you have butterflies flying around in your stomach." she explained.

El shook her head, "No, it's warm and it doesn't feel nervous or bad. It feels good."

"Warm?" Joyce asked, not really understanding.

"Yes." she said, standing up and pointing to her lower stomach.

Joyce let out a small noise of understanding as she finally got what feeling Eleven was talking about. She hadn't ever given the talk to either of her boys, but she could probably explain it well enough, and besides, at least she had asked her instead of Hopper. "El, do you know what sex is?"

She shook her head. "No, I asked Hopper once when someone said it on TV, but he wouldn't tell me."

Okay then, best to start with the basics, Joyce thought. "Here, let's go into my room to talk, okay?" She said. They walked into her room and she shut the door and joined Eleven on the bed where the girl had sat down. "Have you gotten your period yet?"

She nodded. "Max was with me when it started."

Okay, at least she knows about that. "Did she tell you why it happens?"

"Not really," she said with a shrug.

"Okay, so when a girl gets her period, it means her body is ready to make babies, and to make babies, you need to have sex," Joyce explained, waiting for a sign that Eleven had understood so far before continuing.

"So, what is sex then?" she asked.

"Well, do you know how boys and girls have different private parts?"

"Yes. Mike explained that to me when I tried to change in front of them when we first met." she said, thinking about that fateful night over 2 years ago.

"Alright, so sex happens when a boy sticks his... private parts inside a girl's private parts. A baby is made when a boy's sperm connects with a girl's egg."

"How do they connect?" Eleven asked, trying to imagine eggs inside of her body.

Joyce thought about how to explain it without getting too graphic. "Well, the boy kinda moves his part in and out, and does this thing called ejaculation after some time. The sperm comes out and into the girl, where it connects with the egg. They are really small, you can't even see them with your eye." she said, hoping that would make enough sense to the girl.

"So, people have sex to make babies?" she asked, trying to figure out what this had to do with her warm feeling.

"Well, yes, at least that's one reason. Usually only married people do it for that reason. Other married couples and teenagers do it because it feels good."

"So I should do it with Mike?" she asked, thinking it was the most logical things in the world given what she had just heard.

"NO!" Joyce said, scaring Eleven with her raised voice. "I mean, no. Not yet at least. I meant older teenage couples, like 17 at least. And you have to use condoms so you don't get pregnant with a baby."

"Oh," she said, looking a little sad. "So what does this have to do with my warm feeling?"

"Well, I think the feeling you are describing is lust. It's like love, but more having to do with wanting sexual contact with another person. When you start to get older, you feel it more often when you kiss your boyfriend or get aroused."

Eleven looked at her like she had just said the most ridiculous thing. "So my body wants to have sex with Mike, but you said I can't? Well then how do I deal with that feeling?" she asked.

Joyce did really not want to go talking about that in detail, so she compromised with her. "How about I get you a book that tells you about all of this stuff in detail."

"Okay. That sounds good," she agreed.

"Okay sweetie. I'll bring it by sometime tomorrow. And El, don't tell Hop about this stuff. It'll be our little secret."

"Okay Joyce. Thank you for explaining stuff to me.

"Anytime dear."

They walked back into the dining room where Will was finishing up his drawing. He asked them where they had been but they just looked at each other and giggled, much to his confusion.

The next day, Joyce brought her several books on the human body, sex, and female sexuality. Eleven stayed up all night reading and learning about the things her and Joyce had talked about. Unfortunately for Hopper, Joyce and the books forgot to mention that you should probably lock your door when you engage in certain activities mentioned by the book. Eleven was very confused when he walked in the next morning and promptly let out a small yell and slammed the door shut. After he had calmed down, they had had a talk and he explained that even though she had been under the covers and he couldn't see anything, that was still something she should lock the door for. Joyce had nearly died of laughter when he had called her to ask her if she had been the one to teach her about that stuff. She strongly denied it, but deep down, they both knew that he knew the truth.

6. Easter

Mike and Eleven had been dating for just over a month and a half by this point, and were no less in love than they had been when he had asked her out. Much to the rest of the party's annoyance, they now set aside one day a week where they would go out just the two of them on a date to the movies, or the ice cream shop, or even just to hang out in Mike's basement.

Even when the whole party was together, their eyes barely left each other's faces, and their hands were almost permanently entwined. They would often get lost in conversation with each other, pretty much to the point where a train could've crashed through the building and they wouldn't notice. For example, the six of them had been hanging out at the park the weekend before, and Mike and Eleven had strayed off from the group. They were sitting in a patch of grass making flower jewelry for each other, and it had taken 4 shouts of their names before they had realized they were being called.

To his credit though, having a girlfriend seemed to make Mike much more confident. No longer did he blush at moments like this. He wasn't shy to hold her hand everywhere they went, and he unabashedly would kiss her in front of the others, much to their playful disgust. He loved her, and she loved him. Eleven had never really gotten embarrassed, and had always been pretty straightforward about her feelings, so she didn't have any problems with these arrangements.

Today was the time of the week for their date. They had decided to go to the bowling alley before heading to Mike's basement to hang out for a little. As they stepped into Hawkin's only bowling alley, Eleven seemed to be a little overwhelmed by the loud noises and flashing lights, so Mike took her hand and reassured her before pulling her over to the counter to get their shoes. She seemed very perplexed on why they had to change their shoes, but as always, she trusted Mike and did as he asked. She was very glad she did when she saw a younger boy slip and fall because he hadn't worn the right shoes a few minutes later.

They selected their balls and put their names into the machine. Mike

was up first. He had never been a great bowler, and only managed to knock down 5 pins with both of his tries.

"El, do you want the guard rail up since it's your first time?" he asked her as she went over to the line.

"No thanks Mike, I got it." she said before throwing the ball like he had shown her. To his amazement, it sailed in a perfect straight line until it hit the pins. All ten of them went down and she turned away and collected her ball.

"Wow El, who knew you were such a natural!" Mike exclaimed as she came back to where he was sitting.

She smiled. "Thanks."

It was around the 4th strike she got in a row that he began to get suspicious. After he took his fifth turn, he watched as she bowled. Again, a perfect strike. He saw her quickly wipe her nose and his suspicions were confirmed. He walked up to her and grabbed her arm. "You're using your powers, aren't you?"

To his surprise, she began to laugh at him. "Took you long enough to realize, didn't it?" His mouth dropped wide open.

"Did you just pull a prank on me?!"

"Maybe..." she said, leaning in to give him a kiss. He pulled back and she put on a pouty face.

"Eleven Hopper, I can't believe you would do such a thing," he said in mock seriousness before beginning to laugh. She was getting too clever for her own good, he thought to himself as he finally agreed to kiss her.

She played the rest of the game without her powers. It turned out she was even worse than Mike. It was a close game, but with her lead, Eleven managed to win by the tiniest of margins. They walked out of the bowling alley hand in hand, and as a prize, Mike bought her an ice cream cone from their favorite shop. They reached his house and after making some small talk with his mother, went down into the basement. They cuddled up in her blanket fort and watched some of

her favorite soaps that she had gotten Mike hooked on. They took turns reciting the lines, pretending to be the characters on the TV, each trying to be more dramatic than each other.

Eleven exclaimed, "People are going to be AGHAST!" as she threw herself into Mike, fake tears rolling down her cheeks. He couldn't take it seriously anymore though, and burst out laughing when she looked up at him with tear tracks staining her face.

She hit his arm. "Mike, that was my best performance yet and you ruined it!"

He put on a look of feigned distress. "I am so sorry my dear, is there anything I can do to repay you?" he asked her.

She crossed her arms and glared at him. "I guess a good kiss would do it," she said after some careful consideration. He smiled and leaned into her, pushing her down into the fort. They stayed like that for some time, playing kissing each other's lips and necks and faces.

"I. Love. You. More. Than. Anything," he said, each word broken with a kiss. She smiled up at him, about to do the same before they heard the basement door opening.

His mom called down to them, "Mike, Hopper said he'll be here in about fifteen minutes!"

They regretfully separated from each other and she went to get her shoes.

"Hey, are you coming to my Mom's easter party tomorrow? The guys are coming, and I think Max is too."

She had heard the word Easter before. It was why they were now on break. But she still wasn't sure what it was. "What is Easter?"

Mike, very used to her not knowing about holidays by now, was ready with an explanation. "Remember that Jesus guy I told you about around Christmas?" She nodded. "Well, Easter is supposedly the day he rose from the dead. So people celebrate it."

Her eyes got hopeful. "Presents?" she asked.

"Well, kind of, sometimes the Easter Bunny brings you a basket of chocolates in the morning, and then my mom usually makes us do an egg hunt during the day with Holly and Lucas's little sister."

"Eggs and a bunny?" she asked, obviously very confused.

"To be honest, I'm not sure why those things are related to Easter El. But the eggs get hidden and then you have to look around for them. There's usually candy inside them." He told her, and she perked up at the mention of sweets. The girl had a real sweet tooth after all.

"Well, I'm sure my dad doesn't have much planned, so I'll ask him." She heard the horn of Hop's jeep honk twice. "Maybe I'll see you tomorrow Mike," she said, kisses his cheek in farewell.

The Next Day.

Eleven had informed him late last night that she would in fact be coming over to spend Easter with him. She went to bed that night excited to spend the next day with her friends, especially because she was very excited about this easter egg hunt activity. When she woke up however, she was delighted to find a small basket filled with dozens of different chocolates outside her door. She had run over to where Hopper was in front of the stove and jumped on his back and hugged him.

"Thank you thank you thank you!"

He laughed and gently set her down. "You're welcome kid. Now don't eat too much of it. You're bound to get a lot more at the Wheeler's. After we eat breakfast, take a shower and then pick out one of your nice dressers to wear."

"Dress?" she asked.

"Yup. Easter is a fancy holiday, which means we dress up."

"Ugh, okay," she said, a little less excited for the day. While she enjoyed being pretty and dressing up sometimes, today was not one of those days. She wanted to be able to run and jump while they hunted for eggs. She ate her scrambled eggs quickly and took a quick shower before deciding to wear her baby blue dress with her white

flats, which were her nicest pair of shoes. They hopped into his jeep and drove off towards the Wheelers.

Mike's mother always hosted the party and their parents, and this year would be no exception. Max had come last year, so the only new additions would be Hopper and Eleven. Their backyard was decorated with some festive decorations, and Mike had helped her lay out eggs for about an hour this morning. While normally he and his friends thought that doing an easter egg hunt at their age was lame, Mike was very excited for this year, as it would be the first time Eleven had taken part in one, and he was eagerly anticipating her reactions.

While all of the adults were outside drinking wine and talking about grown-up stuff, the party were killing the time until lunch by hanging out in the basement talking about whatever random things came to their mind. At this particular moment, Dustin was chasing Lucas around because he wouldn't admit that Luke Skywalker would have been beaten by Boba Fett if Han Solo hadn't broken his jetpack.

"Admit that I'm right Lucas! Admit it!" Dustin yelled as he chased him.

"Never!" he screamed back, but Dustin had finally cornered him and was not beating him senseless with a pillow. Max grabbed a pillow of her own and went over to Dustin and smacked him so hard he fell down on his butt. Will and Mike rushed to his aid and soon a full blown pillow fight had broken out. They had finally cornered Max and Lucas together and were about to deliver the killing blow when Mike's mom had yelled down that Eleven was here. Mike immediately dropped the pillow and ran upstairs. The others just rolled their eyes before following him.

When he reached the kitchen he saw Eleven standing by the counter talking to Holly. She was wearing an adorable baby blue dress that stopped right above her knees, and had on just a touch of makeup.

"Hi Mike," she said, pulling him into a hug.

"You look beautiful," he said once they had moved apart. He leaned down to kiss her lips and heard the rest of the party groan behind

him, not that either of them cared.

"Gross!" said Dustin pretending to fake vomit.

"Get a room you two!" Lucas agreed.

They just turned and smiled at their friends. They were spared from any further teasing by Mike's mother calling them outside to eat. They all took their places at the table. Ted said grace, and then everyone was allowed to dig in. After he had gotten his food, Mike realized El's plate was still empty.

He leaned over to her and whispered, "Do you know what anything is?"

"Besides bread, no." she answered.

He knew that she was a picky eater, only liking a few meals Hopper consistently made, Eggos, and candy. So he pointed out each dish and told her about what it tasted like compared to foods he knew she ate and what its texture was like. Karen saw him giving her little bites of the items she was interested in off of his plate to help her decide. She smiled at the young couple. She had never seen Mike be so patient or kind to anyone. Not that she thought he was a mean boy of course, but he had a special gentleness that he reserved only for her. Eventually, Eleven decided on having ham, a roll, mashed potatoes, and green beans at Hopper's insistence. Once they were all full of Mrs. Wheeler's incredible food, it was time to start the hunt.

As always Dustin, Will, Lucas, and Max all groaned but got up and went to get a basket. Mike led El over to the baskets where she picked up a purple one and went with Mike over to the starting line. Jonathan took a picture of them all lined up and ready to go, and then the party plus Holly were off to find the eggs.

Eleven sprinted off, pulling Mike along behind her. To make it a little more interesting, the other four had promised 3 dollars each to whoever collected the most eggs. Will and Max had gone off on opposite ends of the yard, but Dustin and Lucas were going after the same eggs again and again, constantly leaping towards one and scuffling over it. Over at the back of the yard, Mike had purposely

hidden lots of eggs for Eleven and Holly to find. It amused him to see her and Holly together, because at this moment they were more alike than not.

When Eleven had picked up her first egg, a pink one, she had turned to Mike with an excited look on her face. "Mike, I found one!" she said, proudly putting it into her basket. Holly had reacted much of the same way when she had found her first one. Eleven and Holly were even working together, looking for eggs side by side. Mike trailed behind, picking up ones they missed, but mostly just watching his girlfriend with love-struck eyes. Even on her 20th egg, her reactions were no less priceless. She would let out little squeals and sounds of excitement every time she found one hiding under a bush or behind a tree before proudly putting it into her basket. They combed through the entire back yard and side yard before realizing they had gotten most of them. They returned to an argument happening between Lucas and Dustin while Max and Will watched with amused looks on their faces.

"I had one more than you Lucas, I won!" when Lucas did nothing but shake his head, he turned to the others for support. "Guys, back me up here!"

"Well, he did say you stole a few that were rightfully his," Will said.

"Dude!"

Max noticed Mike and Eleven approaching them. "Guys, you both lost, look how many she has!" she said, pointing to El's basket, which was practically overflowing with eggs. She had already opened a few and was munching happily on jelly beans when she reached them.

Dustin and Lucas thought this was ridiculous. "She wasn't even in the bet!" they exclaimed.

"Fine. El, who do you think should win?" Max asked her.

"Dustin," she said, without hesitation. Dustin cheered and Lucas gave her a betrayed look. She shrugged at him before trying another jelly bean. They all crowded back into the basement to enjoy their treats while the women did the dishes and the men stayed outside drinking

beer and talking about sports or whatnot. El was sitting quietly on the couch with Mike, happily curled up into his side while she gorged on chocolate and jelly beans from her eggs. He had his arm around her and they stayed there, watching the rest of their friends argue over dumb shit as usual. She looked over and saw that Mike only had 6 eggs in his basket.

"Mike?"

"Yeah El?"

"Why do you only have 6 eggs?" she asked.

He looked at his basket and then down at her. "I guess I was too distracted from watching you collect yours. Your happiness was just too cute." he said.

She frowned, and quickly levitated 12 eggs from her basket into his. Before he could protest, she silenced him with a kiss to the lips. He leaned into it, bringing her close against him. They broke apart and smiled at each other, their foreheads still touching.

"Mike, I had a good time today. I don't care how many eggs I have because I got to spend the day with you."

"You are extremely sappy, you know that right?" he said to her with a grin on his face.

"Well so are you," she said, tapping his nose.

"I love you El."

"I love you too."

7. Fourth of July: Part One

The party had all finished the school year with flying colors. The boys got straight A's on their report cards, which wasn't unusual for them. However, Mike's parents were especially proud of him due to his improvement over last year. His grades had had a major improvement, and he had had no disciplinary actions taken towards him this year. Little did they know that his improvements in school and his mood had to do with the reappearance of Eleven. She had managed to get almost all A's, a fact Hopper was immensely proud of considering it had been her first year of school. He had always been able to tell that she was a quick learner, and her performance didn't disappoint. He had proudly stuck her report card to the fridge when she had come home on the final day of school.

As a small reward to her, he had offered to take her to the movies and then to her favorite ice cream shop downtown. She had asked if Mike could come as well, and he agreed, seeing as it had been his tutoring sessions that had enabled her to get the good grades. So the weekend after school, he took them out. He had mostly observed his daughter and her boyfriend as they walked along the streets of Hawkins with their hand entwined, marveling at the fact that she was finally living a normal life. He didn't mind that he had to observe, as he could tell the boy meant well. He wasn't anything like he had been when he was his age, all those years ago. He truly loved Eleven, and would move the moon for her if she asked him to.

They had gone to see *Ferris Bueller's Day Off*, and while Hopper didn't watch many comedies, he had to admit it was a damn funny movie. They had all laughed their asses off while munching on popcorn and enjoying the simple fact that they wouldn't have school for another 3 months and could hang out almost every day together. After the movie they had all gotten ice cream cones and walked around the local park, just enjoying the warm June evening, talking about whatever came to mind. He took the boy back to his house, where he pretended to be very interested in the radio as the two had kissed goodbye.

The rest of the month passed quickly, and soon enough it was July.

The party spent their days biking around town and hiking through the woods, having campouts where they introduced El to s'mores, which she absolutely loved. They swam around at the quarry, played games in the park like hide and seek. That was El's favorite, and she was extremely good at it. One of the first times they had played, she had levitated herself into a pine tree and had hid there for over an hour before she finally came down. After that, the rest of them had told her she wasn't allowed to use her powers to hide.

They went to the arcade at least twice a week, usually more. They would have tournaments, which either Dustin or Max usually won. The winner would get candy or some money from the others. They had sleepovers at least once a week, where they would play on the Atari, go through Mike's latest D&D campaign, or play games such as truth or dare. They stayed away from games such as Monopoly because that usually ended with Lucas and Dustin arguing and Will falling asleep as he waited for his turn to come. Occasionally they would all go to Hopper's cabin for sleepovers so they could roam the forest at night exploring. He would grumble about them being too loud or it being too crowded, but they all knew he secretly loved them. He would rent movies for them and get them takeout for dinner, and usually give them a good amount of privacy.

On July 2nd, they were all hanging out at Mike's and talking about their annual Fourth of July lake trip they took every year. Last year, Max had joined them, and this year Hopper and Eleven would also be coming along. The Byers had been doing it since they were kids, and when Will and Mike had become friends in kindergarten, he had invited him to come along. And when they met Lucas and Dustin, they began to come too. They would head up to Lake Michigan for 2 whole days of fun in the sun, with plenty of fireworks as well.

"So El, are you excited to finally see the beach?" Dustin asked her as they all sat on the floor and couches in Mike's basement, lounging around. When they had asked her if she wanted to come, they had had to explain to her what a beach was and what purpose it served. They had told her how you could sunbathe, or play games like volleyball and frisbee, or build sandcastles, or play in the water. They had also told her about fireworks. They had explained them as pretty colorful lights in the sky. She had been particularly excited about this

ever since.

She nodded excitedly. "Very much so. I want to build sandcastles the most."

"That is the best part for sure," Will agreed.

"No way man, swimming in the lake is the best," Lucas argued, and Dustin nodded.

"Yeah sure, until you step on a fish!" he yelled back, and they all began laughing. Will had always been good at defusing arguments before they began.

Upon seeing how nervous Eleven looked, Mike reassured her. "He's joking, none of us have ever stepped on a fish," he said. Her face relaxed at his reassuring.

"Have you packed yet El?" Max asked.

She shook her head, "Hopper is helping me pack tonight. He wants to make sure I don't forget anything."

"I'm just excited to lie down, relax, and read a good book," she said. When they all looked at her funny, she glared at them. "What, just cause I'm a tomboy doesn't mean I can't like reading! You nerds love your books!"

They raised their hands in mock surrender. "You've just never mentioned it before, that's all," Lucas said, trying to calm his girlfriend. She didn't look at him until he came up beside her and gave her a quick kiss. She dropped the mean look and smiled at him.

They stayed up late, knowing they could just sleep on the long ride there. They talked about all of the things they wanted to do, like set off firecrackers and light sparklers on the beach. Eleven wanted to have a sandcastle building contest, to which Will quickly agreed. The rest of them said that they would want to do that as well.

At around 9, Eleven was picked up by Hopper to go home and pack, while the rest of them stayed at the Wheelers. Joyce and Hopper would be picking them all up in the morning before starting the

journey to the lake.

"Dad, do you think I should bring my yellow tank top or blue one?" she asked Hopper as he packed his stuff in the other room.

"Just bring both and you can decide there!" he yelled back. She shrugged and threw them in her duffel bag. She had a few pairs of jeans and cargo shorts, along with a few t-shirts. She had gotten flip flops for this very trip, along with a new one piece bathing suit, which was blue and had pink polka dots on it. In the kitchen, they had packed a cooler with burger, hot dogs, drinks, and eggos. She ate them cold or hot, so the fact that there wouldn't be a toaster didn't bother her in the slightest.

She finished packing her bag and levitated it over to the front door. She saw Hopper give her a disapproving look. He didn't like her using her powers unless she had to, because "she had to learn how to do things the hard way," he had said. She just walked over and hugged him before saying goodnight and shutting her bedroom door. With her mind. She heard him groan and she chuckled to herself before slipping into some PJs and drifting off to sleep.

July 3rd

Hopper woke her early the next morning. She mumbled and turned over in her bed, wanting to sleep longer. He laughed and went over to her bed. He picked her up and she let out a little shriek as she was lifted out of the warmth of her covers. She punched his back as he carried her over to the table and sat her down onto the chair. She glared at him but her face softened a bit as he set down a triple Eggo stack in front of her. She picked up her fork and knife and began to dig in,

"So, are you ready for a weekend of summertime fun?" he asked her as he sat down across from her, bagel and coffee in hand.

"Yeah! I'm excited to see my friends, and I bet you're excited to see Joyce," she said with a smirk.

He reached across the table and ruffled her curls, "You bet I am kiddo."

She finished her breakfast and went to the bathroom to take a quick shower before putting on some jean shorts and a white t-shirt. She added a pink headband to the look to keep her hair out of her eyes, and then hung a pink pair of sunglasses Max had bought her onto her shirt before heading out into the living room to meet Hopper. He was checking though their stuff one last time to make sure they had everything. She heard him mumbling to himself as he checked items off his mental list.

"I'm all ready to go Dad!" she said, twirling to show off her outfit.

"Alright El, I just gotta get this stuff into the car and-" he was cut short as she levitated all their baggage at once into the back of his Jeep. He turned to her. "What did I say about using your powers in non-life threatening situations?"

"I know, I know," she said, rolling her eyes. "But I want to see my friends."

"More like you want to see Mike," he said under his breath, but just loud enough for her to hear.

"What was that?" she asked, glaring at him for the second time that morning.

"Ohhhh nothing El. Thanks for moving that stuff though, my back is killing me," he said before walking out of the cabin door. Eleven followed him out, making sure to lock the door. They got into the car and he drove them off towards the Wheelers.

Joyce was already parked outside and the rest of the party was outside as well, just messing around in Mike's front yard while they were waiting for El. Along with the six of them and Hopper and Joyce, Steve, Nancy, and Jonathan were also coming. They pulled up behind the 1st van and Eleven hopped out.

Max ran over to her and hugged her. "El, I love your outfit! It's adorable!"

Eleven twirled for her as she had done for Hop. "Thanks!"

Mike walked over to them and swept her into a hug before giving her

a short kiss. "You do look very cute today El."

Joyce clapped her hands. "Alright guys, we can fit six in the van and five in Hopper's jeep. Pack up your things and get ready to roll!" Eventually after much arguing, it was decided it would be Steve, Nancy, Jonathan, Dustin, Max, and Lucas in one car, and Mike, Eleven, Will, Joyce, and Hopper in the other. They packed up their bags and began the long journey to their cabin on the lake.

Over in the "cool car" as they had named it, the 3 kids and 3 teens were all loudly singing and dancing along to "Girls on Film." Jonathan had made several new mixtapes for the car ride down, and so far everyone was loving them. Up ahead, the other car was pretty much the opposite of the "cool car." Will had brought some paper and crayons for all of them to draw on, and they were all quietly engaged in coloring at the moment while Hopper and Joyce quietly chatted about different things. The radio was on but almost inaudible over the sound of the engine.

After about an hour and a half they pulled into a mcdonalds and stopped to go to the bathroom and grab some food.

"I don't know about you guys, but we're having the time of our lives in the party car!" Dustin said to Will and Eleven while they were waiting in line.

"I thought we were calling it the cool car?" Lucas asked.

"Whatever, it's still an awesome car."

Eleven smiled. "It's been super fun so far. We all colored and then I slept for a little and then we all played eye spy."

Dustin, Max, and Lucas all gave her a funny look but stayed silent. After all, it did kind of make sense. Mike and Will had always been the quietest of their friend group, and Eleven was the quietest of them all, even almost 3 years later.

They all got their food and were back on the road to continue their road trip. Mike was resting his head on El's shoulder and sleeping while she read one of several books she had brought with her, and Will was talking to Hopper and his mother about activities they had

planned for at the lake.

Unfortunately for El, no one had warned her about motion sickness. She was sitting and reading happily while munching on french fries. She began to feel a little sick to her stomach but she shrugged it off, owning it up to her period starting soon. About ten minutes later though, she started feeling much worse and shut her book before resting her head on the seat in front of her. She stayed like that with her eyes closed.

She felt Mike shake her shoulder. "Are you okay?" he asked.

She shook her head. "Stomach hurts."

"Were you reading?" he asked her and she nodded. "Hopper, can we pull over for a minute or two? El was reading and she feels really car sick now." Hopper nodded and called the others over his radio to tell them to pull over to the side for a few minutes. Eleven got out of the car and had some water, and a few minutes later they were back on the road. Eleven decided that sleeping on Mike's shoulder was much more preferable to reading. An hour later they were curled up on the back seat, and Joyce managed to snap a picture of them with a polaroid camera.

Finally, they pulled into the campsite a few hours later and parked next to their cabin. Dustin jumped out of the car and ran into the cabin, yelling about how he had to pee. Max followed him in, yelling about how she had been holding it longer. Mike and Eleven got up and stretched outside of the car. Hopper and Joyce began unpacking the vans and had everyone carry their stuff in.

Steve, Nancy and Jonathan quickly changed into their bathing suits and went down to the 18 and up bar a little ways away to hang out with people their age. The rest of them put on their bathing suits and told Hopper and Joyce they would be down by the lake in front of their cabin. They grabbed their shovels and buckets and sprinted down to the beach.

"So El, as it is your first time here, we decided that you can decide what we do first!" Mike announced as they spread out their towels and set down their things.

"Sandcastles," she said, pointing to the several buckets and shovels they had brought down. Dustin and Lucas groaned, as all they wanted to do was swim in the water, but Max and Mike elbowed them to shut them up. Will high fived Eleven for her choice of activity before grabbing 2 of the buckets, a butter knife, and a shovel before running off to get water. As the most artistically inclined of their group, everyone knew he would most likely build the most impressive castle of the day, not that it would stop any of them from trying their hardest. Mike decided he would help El, as it was her first time.

"So, what do you want this to look like?" he asked her as he poured water into the sand to make it more appropriate for sandcastle building."

She picked up a shovel and began digging. "I want it to be big. Really big," she said, stopping to point to a shovel. He got the idea and began to dig a hole with her.

As they dug, everyone else had begun to shape their piles of sand into towers and buildings. Dustin, Lucas and Max had all decided to join their castles and were now in the process of building a large moat around the bases of their three castles.

After an hour, several restarts when someone had accidentally stepped on a part of the castle, and a few arguments over what should go where, they were done. Will had built a magnificent three level castle, complete with a moat that had several bridges and a wall around it, and multiple towers. Max, Dustin, and Lucas had made a bunch of small buildings surrounded by their enormous moat. Mike and Eleven, well, had dug a really big hole, and now everyone noticed that Eleven was up to her neck in sand. They had been planning on turning the gigantic mountain of sand into a castle, and had even started the process of building a doorway and several towers into the sides before Eleven wanted to be buried. Now he was lying on his stomach, booping her nose with his fingers and kisses her lips and nose and forehead every few seconds. She giggled as he peppered her face with kisses as she could do nothing about it.

Dustin groaned, "Guys, they're doing that thing again," he said.

"What thing?" Max asked.

"That weird thing where they just start staring into each other's eyes and forget there's other people around," Lucas said.

"Hey lovebirds! We're all done so how about you dig El out and then we can go in the water!" Dustin yelled, but they didn't notice. Eleven was now trying to reach her head forward enough to kiss him but he was staying just out of range, teasing her before moving in just close enough for her to peck him on the lips before pulling away again.

"Guys! Earth to Mike and El!" Lucas shouted. Will and Max just laughed as they finally noticed the others staring at them.

"Yeah guys?" he asked.

Dustin pointed to the lake. "We wanna go in, so get El out!"

He nodded and began digging around her. She looked around and only saw a group of about 10 teenage girls in the water, all of them facing away from them. She concentrated and quickly brought up each individual grain of sand around her, and in a few seconds she was sitting in an empty hole. She climbed out and dusted herself off, looking up to see amazed looks on all of her friends faces. "You guys ready?" she asked before running down to the lake. Her friends looks at each other with bewildered looks on their faces before joining her in the lake.

Eleven had learned how to swim earlier that summer from Hopper and Mike in the quarter, and had quickly shown her natural ability at it, becoming the best swimmer in her friend group. They laughed and splashed each other and just floated in the calm and warm water.

After around 30 minutes had passed, two of the girls had come over and introduced themselves as Abigail and Gabby. They had asked them if they wanted to join them in a game of volleyball, and Lucas, Max, Dustin, and Will all agreed. Eleven told Mike she had wanted to keep swimming, so they stayed in the water.

As their party members and the girls ran back onto the beach to setup the net, Eleven realized she was the only one wearing a one piece

bathing suit, and began to feel funny. She wanted to cover up and put on her clothes so no one would see her in her suit. Mike noticed her quietness. "Is everything okay El?" he asked.

She turned to him, and as usual, she didn't beat around the bush. "Do you think I'm pretty Mike?"

He gave her a dumbfounded look. "El, of course I think you're pretty. Why would you ask that?"

"Because, all of those girls are wearing cute bathing suits and I'm just wearing this one-piece," she said, looking down at the water.

He laughed, surprising her. She looked up at him before he pulled her close to him and wrapped her in a hug, leaning down to passionately kiss her for several seconds. When he pulled back, he saw her blushing.

"Eleven Jane Hopper, you are the most beautiful girl I have ever laid my eyes on. No other girl in existence could compare to your beauty. I don't care if you're wearing that bathing suit or a dress or sweatpants while covered in Eggo crumbs, you will always be the most gorgeous girl I have ever seen and will ever see."

She smiled and pulled him down to kiss him again. "I knew I made a good boyfriend choice."

He smiled at her, "Come on, let's go up there and read while those dummies play with those girls."

"Okay," she said, smiling. They walked out of the water hand in hand over to their blankets and sat down to read their books. She laid her head in his lap and began to read. This is what pure happiness felt like, she thought. They were there for another hour or so, and she fell asleep at some point. She awoke to Mike gently shaking her, telling her they were going back to the cabin for dinner. The other girls had just left and they all walked back to the cabin, enjoying the warm summer air and sounds of nature surrounding them as they talked about the day's experiences.

They reached the cabin and saw Joyce and Hopper sitting side by side and holding hands as they grilled burgers and hot dogs for

everyone. They said hi and told them about their day as the food continued to cook. Steve, Nancy and Jonathan returned a few minutes later and Steve went to sit next to Dustin, showing him a fossil he had found on their walk through the woods. Nancy told them all about how they had seen some of Steve's idiot friends at the club, but they had been so drunk they had ended up throwing up everywhere and then had gotten kicked out.

They all ate a filling dinner and then decided to walk around the campsite together, all 11 of them. The couples all walked hand in hand, and as it got colder Mike gave El his sweatshirt. When they returned to the campsite, all of the kinds changed into their PJs before returning outside to see that Hopper had started a fire for them. They all grabbed camp chairs and set them up around the fire. Eleven sat on Mike's lap, and after he glanced at Hopper and he had gotten a reassuring nod, he calmed down. They roasted marshmallows and told ghost stories and the boys had sword fights with flaming sticks. Well, they did until Joyce had put a stop to it when she realized what was going on.

When everyone's eyes started to droop, and El and Will fell asleep completely, Hopper sent everyone off to bed. There were enough beds for everyone to have their own, but Eleven quickly snuggled up with Mike in his bunk, and Nancy did the same with Jonathan.

"Thanks for a wonderful day Mike," she whispered as they laid in bed together.

"I had a great time too El," he said, kissing her goodnight.

Hopper and Joyce stayed outside for a while after they heard the cabin fall silent. They sat

next to each other for a while, enjoying the warmth from the fire and each other's company. She took his hand and kissed it. "Thanks for coming Hop," she said, kissing him on the lips.

"Well I couldn't let you deal with six young teens alone. All those hormones make them hard to deal with," he said after she had retreated.

"I know, but I meant it as a thanks to specifically me. I like having you around a lot."

"Well I might just have to move in then, won't I?"

"Eh, I don't know Hop. I might get tired of you then."

He just smiled at her. "That's a risk I'll have to take then," he said before sweeping her into a passionate kiss. It wasn't the fourth just yet, but she could feel fireworks exploding throughout her body.

8. Fourth of July: Part Two

The night was peaceful for the entire party. Eleven had no nightmares and slept soundly next to Mike all night. Joyce and Hopper ended up falling asleep outside as they watched the fire die down after the kids had gone to sleep. Steve had ended up falling asleep next to Dustin, and everyone would be sure to make fun of the two when they saw them cuddling the next morning. Even months later, it still amazed Nancy and Jonathan how Steve had gone from the king of high school to a babysitter/parent of 6 rowdy teens.

Eleven woke up first, as she was usually the first asleep and first awake. She lied in bed next to Mike for awhile, watching him. She traced his freckles with her fingers, making designs in her mind. She remembered when he had taken her stargazing and shown her different constellations in the sky, and she giggled as she thought about how his freckles were similar to the stars. She got out of bed finally and grabbed a tank top and a pair of shorts before using the bathroom and changing. When she came out of the bathroom and sat back down on the bed, she noticed Mike awaking.

His long black hair was sticking up in crazy ways as he sat up on an elbow and rubbed the sleep out his eyes. He smiled when he saw El looking at him and she smiled back. "Morning," he said, sitting all the way up and hugging her.

"Morning Mike," she said before giving him a peck on the lips.

He looked at her and noticed that she was already dressed and seemingly ready for the day. He glanced around the room and saw everyone asleep, and he had to stifle his laughter with his hands when he saw Steve and Dustin holding each other in their sleep. He would never let Harrington hear the end of this.

"Wanna go for a walk before everyone else wakes up?" he asked her, standing up out of bed and looking around for his bag. He found it and grabbed a black t-shirt and some cargo shorts.

"Sure! Can we walk along the lake?" She asked him.

He nodded. "Yeah, just let me get dressed first. He went into the bathroom and quickly changed and brushed his teeth. Eleven went to the cooler and grabbed four Eggos for them to eat while they walked.

He came out of the bathroom and gladly accepted the two cold Eggos she handed him. They opened the door to the cabin and walked outside. The camp chairs were still around the firepit, and as they looked around, they noticed Hopper and Joyce together leaning against a log asleep. Joyce's tiny figure was almost engulfed in his arms. As they approached, Hopper opened his eyes and slowly got up, leaning Joyce against the log gently so she stayed asleep.

"Sleep well?" he whispered to them as they got close.

They both nodded. "Yep, no nightmares at all!" El told him.

"Good. Where are you two off to so early in the morning?" he asked as he noticed that they were fully dressed.

"We're going to take a walk by the lake," she said.

"Okay. Be careful and don't be gone too long. I suspect everyone will be up as soon as I get this bacon started and then after breakfast we're going for a hike," he said, and they nodded in understanding. El offered her hand to him and he took it.

They walked side by side, enjoying the cool morning air and the smells of the lake and sand. They quietly ate their Eggos and just enjoyed each other's company. Mike thought that Eleven's quiet nature was one of the best things about her. He had always been a soft-spoken child, preferring to observe rather than participate in conversations. When he was with her, they could have moments such as now, where it would be silent but they were never awkward for either of them. They were comfortable just to be together. Not that they never talked, but sometimes it was just nice to be quiet together reading or drawing or watching movies cuddled up under a blanket in his basement.

"I remember I once heard a man talking about the ocean in the lab," she said beside him, shaking him out of his thoughts.

“Yeah?” he said, urging her to go on.

“I asked Papa about it, but he told me it wasn’t important. This isn’t the ocean, but I never thought I’d see this much water in one place,” she said. While the lake was big enough to have waves, they were nothing like the Pacific Ocean, which Mike had seen once on a family trip to California.

“I promise El, I’m going to make sure you see the Ocean someday,” he said, stopping her and turning to face her. He took both of her hands in his and held them up in front of them “I promise I will show you everything and anything you want to see.”

She was beaming from ear to ear. She stood on her tiptoes and laid a passionate kiss on his lips. He leaned down to make it easier for her and pulled her body against his and cupped her face with his other hand.

They separated after a minute or two, both of them breathless. Their foreheads were still touching, and they looked at each other with adoration in their eyes. After what seemed much too soon to El, but was at least several minutes, he pulled away and took her hand in his again. “Come on, we’ve been gone at least half an hour. We better start heading back before anyone starts to get mad,” he said, and she laughed at that.

They ran along the beach, the soft sand squishing through their toes. They reached the cabin in record time, and as they came closer they saw everyone outside sitting around a fire eating breakfast. Dustin saw them first.

“Oh look, here comes the lovebirds!” he shouted at them. Before, Mike just would have blushed and dropped her hand, but now he just smiled before turning to her and planting a wet kiss on her cheek. All of the kids groaned while the older teens and adults just rolled their eyes at the young couple.

“You’re one to talk Dustin, we saw you and Steve getting pretty cozy this morning!” he teased back, and Dustin went red, while everyone who had seen the two began to laugh.

“We were just talking and happened to fall asleep okay. It’s not that big of a deal!,” he yelled at them, which only caused them to laugh harder. Thankfully, Steve wasn’t embarrassed and reached over to ruffle his curly hair.

Mike and Eleven took their seats where they had been sitting last night and listened to the conversation happening around the fire. Steve and Jonathan were discussing the newest music albums they were listening to while Joyce and Nancy talked about a new chick-flick that had come out the previous month. They were setting up a date for them and Eleven and Max to see it all together, as they saw themselves as the de-facto mentors of the girls in all things girly.

Max and Dustin were talking about the hike they were going on later, and Will and Lucas were trying to explain something about D&D to the Chief, who was trying his hardest to look interested.

“I hear there’s a small path that comes off the big one, and if you follow it, it takes you to a good sized waterfall that you can touch! You even have to go over a cliff to get to it Max. It’s awesome,” they heard Dustin telling her.

Hopper took this comment as his chance to excuse himself from the D&D conversation. “Now I’m not sure about that. I took five four-limbed children from their parents yesterday, and I intend to return five four-limbed children to their parents tomorrow,” Hopper said with an exasperated tone, causing everyone around the fire to laugh.

Everyone finished their breakfast soon after and began to get ready for the hike. Lucas strapped on his camo bandana he wore on every adventure, and then put on a belt that held his knife from Nam. In his backpack was his trusty wrist rocket and binoculars. Everyone put on their jackets and boots or sneakers, as it was supposed to be a pretty intense trail they were hiking on. Hopper made sure to bring bandages and ointment just in case any slips happened, and plenty of water for all of them to drink. Ten minutes later they were all walking down the path that would lead them to the trail. Joyce and Hopper walked up front holding hands, the kids walked in the middle chasing each other around, and Jonathan, Nancy, and Steve walked in the back to make sure no one fell behind.

They began the trail. It was around 5 miles and went in a loop which would lead them back here. About halfway there was a small outlook point up high before the downhill part of the trail where they planned to have lunch. This was also where Dustin's waterfall was, something he desperately hoped he would forget about. The uphill portion they were on now was quite easy going at first, and the boys talked about Star Wars or some nonsense while Max and Eleven shared some girl time and talked about makeup or whatever they talked about. After about ten minutes however, they were all silent and panting as they held onto trees to pull themselves forward. They clambered up and over rocks, Hopper making sure to help them up some of the high rocky areas. Everyone seemed to be out of breath completely after half an hour, so he stopped them on the flattest part of ground he could find before passing around water bottles. When he went to pass one to El, he noticed she was strangely not breathing hard at all, and she reached up to wipe away a small trickle of blood from her nose.

He stared at her bewildered. "El, are you using your powers to make this easier?" he said, getting everyone's attention.

"Well, yes. It was hard without them," she said like it was the most logical thing ever.

"What?! How?" Dustin asked. He was the most unathletic of them all, and was extremely jealous she could make it easier for herself.

"Well, I just make myself lighter almost. Then it isn't as hard to climb as much."

"Lighter?" Hopper asked.

"Well, it's kinda like levitating, but not noticeable on the outside."

He didn't really understand, but that wasn't the problem. "El, you'll never get stronger if you never do anything without using your powers. For the rest of the hike, I don't want you using them. Understand?"

"But dad, it hurts when I don't," she whined.

“Good. Than it means it’s working and you’re getting stronger,” he said, and she opened her mouth to protest but he held up his hand, silencing her. His decision was final. They began to trek upwards again, and he looked back every few minutes to check her for nosebleeds but saw none, and in about ten minutes, she was breathing just as hard as the rest of them.

“This. Sucks. So. Much,” she said after another 10 minutes, each word punctuated by a heavy breath.

“Here,” Mike said, extending his hand. She gladly took it and he helped her over a log that was covering the path.

Hopper glanced back at the party. “We only have a half mile more to the lookout and then we’ll rest for a while!”

Dustin groaned. “Another half mile?”

Max hit him playfully on the arm. “Come on Dustin you’ve already gone two. What’s half a mile more?” she asked.

“It’s too muchhhh,” he whined, but he didn’t continue after that.

After another 15 minutes or so, the ground finally leveled out and they were rewarded with the best view Eleven had ever seen. She could see for miles across the lake and land beside it. See could even see some cities and towns further away.

“It’s beautiful,” she said.

“Yeah. It sure is kid,” Hopper agreed, and the rest of them all nodded or said their own words of agreement. They moved back from the edge of the cliff and sat down wherever there was room. Hopper passed around the water bottles once more, and Joyce handed PB&J’s to everyone as well. They sat for around half an hour, eating and talking about the trip up and whatever else came to mind.

Dustin stood up and wiped his hands on his pants. “I’m gonna go to the bathroom and then we’re gonna search for that waterfall!” he said.

“I’ll join you,” Lucas said, standing up, and Will, Mike, and Max

joined him.

Hopper groaned. "Jonathan, Steve, go with them to make sure no one kills themselves.

Eleven frowned. She also had to go to the bathroom but wasn't sure how she was supposed to do that without a toilet.

"El, you coming?" Mike asked.

"In a little. I want to rest more," she told him, and he nodded.

"Okay. We'll be over that way when you're ready."

She smiled at him and he walked away. Once he was well out of earshot she leaned over to Nancy, who was sitting beside her and talking to Joyce. "Nancy, I have to pee?"

"Just go over there in some bushes or something El," she said. After a few seconds she noticed the girl hadn't moved.

"But how? There's nowhere to sit," she said.

"Oh. Well, I guess I can show you," the older girl said before standing up and pulling the other girl up with her. They walked some distance in the opposite way the boys had gone before stopping in some bushes. After an awkward moment where Nancy showed her how to do it, she gave the girl some privacy before walking her back to the outlook. She sat back down and Eleven went the way Mike had shown her. It wasn't hard to find them, as their shouting voices were easy to hear through the trees. She came out onto a small rocky beach and saw the 6 boys and Max swimming around in the water.

"Max! You're in your underwear!" she shouted as if the girl wasn't aware her clothes were not on her body anymore.

She laughed. "El, it's fine. They don't look any different than my bathing suit," she said. El looked and saw that besides them being different colors, there was almost no difference from her underwear and her bathing suit she wore yesterday.

"Hop in El! It feels really good!" Will shouted.

Well, she was very hot, and if Max was doing it, it must be okay. She pulled off her pants and shorts and jumped into the water. Will had been right, the cool water was extremely soothing to her warm and sweaty body. They swam around for awhile, splashing each other and having chicken fights. Eleven continually won hers, and Dustin was sure she was using her powers. She swore she wasn't, but her continued to say that she was. So the next time they faced off against each other, she sent him flying off Steve's shoulders 10 feet into the water.

He came up sputtering and she just smiled at him. "Powers," was her only explanation.

Eventually, Nancy, Joyce, and Hopper found them as sat on the rocky beach talking as they played in the water for a while. Jonathan got out of the water and extended a hand towards her, inviting her into the water.

She blushed. "Um, Jonathan, I'm not wearing the best underwear for that right now," she said, looking down at her feet. He grinned and kissed her before jumping back in.

After about an hour, Hopper stood up and told them they had to get out. They laid in the sun for around 15 minutes so their undergarments would dry some before putting their clothes back on. The trip down the trail was much easier than the way up, as they were going with gravity and not fighting it anymore. It was all going smoothly until about halfway down. They had reached a really steep area of the trail, and Hopper was going first, helping everyone make their way down. Lucas was about to grab his hand when the rock beneath him slipped and he began to fall. Everyone let out a scream as he started to fall around 15 feet. But before he hit the ground, he stopped in mid air. He felt himself being lowered gently to the ground, and without even looking he knew it was El. Sure enough, the girl was staring at him, eyes half closed and a small stream of blood coming out her nose.

He settled gently on the ground and waited until everyone had made their way down. Hopper ran over to him and began looking him over for any broken bones or cuts.

“You okay kid?” he asked.

He nodded. “Just a little shaken is all,” he told him. Hopper nodded as he began to bandage a small cut he had sustained from a tree branch during his fall. Lucas thought about the last time El had sued her powers in such a major way on him. It had been three years ago in the junkyard when he and Mike had been fighting. She had thrown him over 10 feet into some metal siding. That was before they had been friends, and now she had just saved him from broken bones or even death.

He stood up and walked over to her, wrapping her into a hug. “Thank you El. You saved me.”

She smiled at him. “Friends help friends,” she said, and Hopper could tell that would become another one of her saying like “Friends don’t lie”.

The rest of the hike passed without any more excitement, and they reached the cabin after another hour or so. They all changed into more comfortable clothes to relax in and did different things to pass time until the fireworks began. Mike and Eleven sat on the beach reading, Will, Dustin, Steve and Jonathan all played cards, and Max, Nancy, and Joyce all sat around the firepit talking. Hopper eventually joined Mike and El on the beach with a cigarette in his mouth. He sat silently a little ways away, watching the water.

Soon enough, it began to get dark. Hopper got the firecrackers and sparklers they had bought as well as several lighters. Jonathan got his camera to take pictures of the kids running around the beach. Mike showed Eleven how to light the sparklers, and she sat in awe as she watched the first one burn down until it went out. She stuck the burnt stick back into the flame of a lighter several times before Hopper saw and explained she needed a new one. With her new one, the party showed her how she could write things in the air with the sparklers. She wrote her name, her friends name, and “I love you Mike” before he pulled her into his arms and kissed her.

Eventually, Dustin grabbed the firecrackers as well as some old toy soldiers he had found in his room before they had left. He set them up on the beach, quickly lighting three before running back five feet.

Eleven watched with anticipations before the first one went off with a horribly loud sound. She slapped her hands over her ears and stumbled back a few feet. No one noticed but Mike as they were all cheering as they soldiers were blown apart, and Hopper and Joyce had gawn back to the cabin to grab sodas and blankets for the big firework show.

He went to her and took her hands. "What's wrong?" he asked.

She pointed at the burnt remains of the firecrackers. "Loud."

He nodded in understanding. She had always had a problem with loud noises. He wasn't

sure as to why, but he suspected it had to do with something the lab had done to her. He grew angry, as it was just another part of her life she would always have trouble with due to those assholes. He remembered the 3rd sleepover they had had. It had started thunderstorming in the middle of the night, and he had woken up to her quiet sobs as she cried and winced every time the thunder crashed, shaking the house. He had held her in his arms, rubbing her back everytime it happened until she has fallen asleep. Tonight would be no different.

Another firecracker went off, and he saw her wince and her lip begin to quiver. He quickly took her in his arms and began to rub her back and whisper soothing words into her ear. Hopper was coming back with Joyce, his arms full of blankets, and he saw he shake when the firecracker went off. Before he could even react, he saw Mike hold her and try to reassure her, which made his heart swell. As she lived with him, he knew about all of her issues with textures and loud sounds and a list of other things. He knew Mike was a good guy for El, and this only reaffirmed that suspicion.

"Shh, it's okay El. They can't hurt you. It's just a small pop and then it's over," he said

into her ear, and she relaxed a little against him, but still winced as another one went off behind them. "Want me to stop them?"

She shook her head. She didn't want to ruin their fun, which they

were obviously having.

The boys and Max shouted in excitement every time one went off, destroying more and more soldiers.

“Okay. But the big ones are even louder, but they make really pretty lights. Maybe we can try it for a little, and if you don’t like it, then we can go back to the cabin and hide under a blanket together until it’s over?” he suggested, and she nodded in agreement. He loved firework shows, but he had seen dozens of them. Eleven would always be first in his life.

They joined the circle, and he comforted her everytime one of the firecracker went off, but as time went on she began to relax a little bit. Soon they all lied down on the spread out blankets and waited. After a few minutes they announced it would be beginning soon, and then they saw the first one fly up into the air. El covered her ears with her hands and Mike held her close to him. It exploded with an enormous bang, making her shudder against him, but her fear was soon forgotten as she stared in awe at the red and blue pattern it had made in the sky.

“Where’d it go?” she asked in surprise when it disappeared.

“It only stays for a few seconds because it cools down after a little bit and you can’t see it anymore,” he explained.

She still held her ears each time another one went off, but her shudders and winces become less and less prominent even though they never fully went away. She loved seeing the pretty blues and golds and greens and whites burst into patterns in the sky before being replaced with yet another one.

Eventually the explosions slowed and stopped for a few seconds. “Done?” she asked him.

He shook his head. “No, this is the finale. It’s going to be a lot of the fireworks very quickly and it’s pretty loud too,” he said, and she nodded with a grim determination.

The fireworks came with a fury, lighting up the sky, lake, and beach.

While it was extremely loud, she didn't want to turn away. The spectacle was amazing. Dozens of fireworks going off at once, each intricate pattern mixing with others. All too soon and yet just at the right time, it ended. While she had liked the colors, she hadn't been sure of she could take more of those loud noises before it became too much.

They walked back to the cabin and made another fire. Little pops could be heard around the campsite as other campers set off small fireworks, but they were quiet enough that El didn't mind. It was almost a repeat of last night. They made smores, talked, and the boys did stupid things with sticks that were on fire. Eventually, Will fell asleep on his mom's shoulder and Eleven could feel her eyes beginning to close as she leaned against Mike. Hopper sent them all to bed and she changed into some PJs before laying down next to Mike.

"Thanks for the weekend Mike, and for helping me when I was afraid," she told him, facing him as they lied in bed.

"Of course El. If it was up to me, you'd never be afraid. I'm proud of you for watching the fireworks. Did you like them?" he asked.

"Yes. The lights, not the noises."

He smiled at her. "The lights were pretty, but you'll always be the most beautiful thing I've ever seen."

She rolled over on top of him and kissed at his lower lip as she wrapped her arms around him underneath his back. He grabbed her and pulled her as close as she could come. He kissed her neck and she giggled quietly before kissing his lips. It was a passionate kiss filled with fire and she began to feel that warm heat in her stomach again. Knowing what it was now she cursed the shared cabin, as she could do nothing about it later on.

"Hey! Some of us want to sleep without listening to you suck face all night!" Dustin yelled from across the dark cabin. El giggled and rolled off of him.

He looked into her eyes, barely visible in the darkness.

“I love you, Mike Wheeler,” she declared.

“I love you, Jane Hopper,” he said, joking around by using her real name, which only teachers and non-party members called her. She hit his arm and he laughed quietly. “I love you El.”

She kissed him one last time before they drifted off to sleep in each other's arms.